A Movie Star Pares the Apple Industry

By JOHN NICHOLSON

Hysteria among mothers. School administrators dumping apple juice down the drain. Newscasters relishing the role of sternly warning America. Action footage on TV of apples being processed mechanically.

That's what took place recently for several weeks, all because of one movie star who decided she wanted to "get involved."

Meryl Streep, who was made famous by her role in the anti-business *Silkwood* movie, told her friend Robert Redford that she wanted to do something politically as a mother. Redford sent her to a group of which he's a

STREEP

director, called the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), which was supporting (behind the scenes because it's a non-profit 501[c][3] tax-exempt group) a legislative battle to stiffen the pesticide laws last year. "They sent me the [draft] report and I read it and the top of my head came off," Streep recalls.

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the rats' livers; then cancers grew. Continued testing at lower levels is now trying to determine if the cancers grew because of renal failure or because of the chemical.

Meanwhile, because of the scary news, virtually all use in the U.S. of Alar was stopped voluntarily by apple growers after the first test results became known and EPA issued its preliminary warning.

NRDC put into its computers residue levels primarily from FDA's inspectors in southern California—not exactly apple country—and then adjusted them for national rates which augmented the Alar findings. Further, as scientists from the National Food Processors Association have explained, NRDC used an out-of-date potency constant for UDMH, a breakdown component of daminozide.

"This potency constant was based on data acknowledged to be flawed and inappropriate for purposes of risk assessment," NFPA said. "This error alone is expected to lead to a ten-fold overestimate of risk from UDMH exposure."

Regardless, the company's refusal to take Alar off the market until tests are complete to verify the one case from extremely high dosage has created the aura of industrial obstinacy, fueling Streep's emotional message.

"We firmly believe," says Uniroyal Crop Protection Manager James A. Wylie Jr., "that if we submit to the pressure created by the sensationalism of the media and environmentalists and voluntarily withdraw a product that we honestly believe to not present a risk to public health, then we should not be in this business."

Finally, as the hysteria grew, EPA and the FDA and the USDA's Food and Consumer Services took the highly unusual step of issuing a joint press release. "Data used by NRDC, which claims cancer risks from Alar are 100 times higher than the EPA estimates, were rejected in 1985 by an independent scientific advisory board created by Congress," the release said.

"Not since Orson Welles landed the Martians in New Jersey has an entertainer unleashed such hysteria on the land," wrote Washington *Post* columnist Jerry Knight. "Streep and her pesticide-paranoid understudies have irreparably damaged the American apple industry, using tactics no less terrorist than poisoning grapes."

"Both consumer and institutional outlets just stopped buying apples [and apple products]," complains Paul S. Weller, president of the Apple Processors Association, a leading trade group. "The government has acted responsibly. Our industry has. The chemical company is acting within the law in good faith. Who's responsible for the financial devastation?

"Maybe it's time for a 'truth-in-allegations' law to make these self-appointed guardians of the public health be held personally responsible for the economic consequences of their acts. If Ms. Streep or others were forced to obtain insurance to protect their personal wealth, then perhaps this might rein in their zeal to capitalize on their personal popularity."

That the issue is complex and controversial is proven by EPA's request last year to the National Academy of Sciences to study how to translate animal toxicity findings into possible effects on humans at adult *and* child levels of use.

"EPA and others have pointed to the lack of scientific validity in the suggestion by the NRDC that the risk is much greater than has been stated by EPA.... Risk estimates for Alar and other pesticides based on animal testing are rough and are not precise predictions of human disease. Because of conservative assumptions used by EPA, actual risks may be lower or even zero," the government said. ■

Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/pgcl0000

In a Washington *Post* article, Streep explained how she and NRDC devised a new lobbying arm called "Mothers and Others for Pesticide Limits" (as if there were none now). She arranged for a town meeting in her Connecticut village to be televised by "60 Minutes" for instant reaction to the horrible tales to be told by NRDC's paid scientists.

NRDC decided to use Streep to publicize its latest attack on governmental regulators — this time for not adequately considering the effects on children, when relying on animal testing to gauge the effects on humans in evaluating pesticides to be used on foods. To do so, NRDC aimed at several chemicals to determine residues left on the produce, within legal limits, and then extrapolated from those levels what could be regarded as potentially toxic to children.

NRDC hit a public relations bonanza with "Alar"—daminozide produced by Uniroyal. First fingered by EPA in 1985, Alar (or more precisely, its metabolite UDMH) was found in one test of extremely high dosages on rats to ruin

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